

GENERAL SAMUEL
CHAPMAN ARMSTRONG

FOUNDER'S DAY ADDRESS, 1913

By

HENRY PITT WARREN, L.H.D.

HEADMASTER OF THE ALBANY ACADEMY

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GENERAL SAMUEL CHAPMAN ARMSTRONG

An address delivered in Memorial Church, Hampton Institute, by Henry Pitt Warren, L.H.D., headmaster of The Albany Academy, Albany, New York, on Sunday, February second, nineteen hundred and thirteen, in celebration of Founder's Day.

YEARS ago it was an honored custom in some parts of this pleasant Southland—perhaps it is today—for friends, months after they had lain away their dead and after time had dulled somewhat the edge of sad memories and toil had diverted minds, to meet and in memorial service lovingly revive the face and form, the spirit and the work of the absent one. In this spirit we who knew General Armstrong and you to whom his name is but a lively tradition have assembled, and on the spot, too, which he tenderly loved and which he forever consecrated by his life and martyr death given freely to the upbuilding of two great sections of the American people whom the State and Society had sadly neglected—the Negro and the Indian. I can add nothing to the fascinating story of his life which his daughter has told most charmingly and sympathetically and to which loving college friends have contributed delightful details on occasions similar to this. It is my purpose today to review with you the conditions that educated General Armstrong and the way that he used his opportunities.

We speak of a man's environment as though it was born with him but it is as old as the ages which have developed it. Every political, social, or religious idea which blesses man today existed in crude form in the twilight of history, and these ideas, highly developed are still often found in the minds of men alongside those which are most rudimentary. In the same community live the pantheist and the theist, the communist and the believer in private property, the anarchist and the respecter of law. More than this the same individual may hold the most rudimentary ideas along certain lines of thought and well-developed ideas along other lines of thought. A man may be a theist, a believer in private property, a firm supporter of law, and yet be saturated with race prejudice, which is as

rudimentary as belief in ghosts and fairies. A man is well born if his family has accepted and assimilated the essentials of the wisdom of the ages until, as General Armstrong well put it, that wisdom has become instinct. Wealth has nothing to do with this directly, unless, as often happens, a family has learned to keep money in its place, for money, like fire, is a useful servant but a bad master.

Measured by my standards Samuel Chapman Armstrong was well-born—supremely well-born. His father was a Scotch Irish Presbyterian, his mother a New England Puritan, the two most virile strains in our political and religious history.

They were born during the period when American rural life had attained its greatest perfection. The population of the country, even in New England, was still overwhelmingly rural just as it was in the South at the close of the Civil War and as it is today. Each state was practically an aggregation of small farms tilled by their owners and their children, assisted perhaps by the son of a neighbor. Foreigners were unknown; there were no alien religions or hostile theories of government. Machinery, too, was unknown; daily toil, menial toil, if you please, was practically the lot of all. Labor with the hands was held in the highest esteem, and the charm of it all was that the respect paid it was unconscious. Senator Hoar in his "Memoirs" notes with interest the fact that so many of his ancestors were engaged in what would be called menial employments. In this simple life the brothers of United States senators, jurists, and college professors milked their cows, groomed their horses, and from sun-up to sun-down, yes, from dawn to dark, performed the multifarious duties that pertained to the carrying on of a well-appointed farm. They could neglect nothing, forget nothing, would they keep from ultimate bankruptcy. Each farmer was his own buyer and seller as well as his own producer. Thrift to such persons was a sacred duty, for out of it came the money for the refinements of home, education, and the church; if this thrift was perverted it became a god and men grovelled to it. Each farm was a daily school for the development of that mighty force which we call *initiative*. With this civilization, and an essential part of it, too, was the common school, often imperfectly taught but a power because of the earnestness of both teacher and pupil. Above it was the academy for the capable and farther on the college for the winnowed wheat. Over each community in New England and the Middle States was a clergyman, college-bred, generally, who preached to these farmer folk a gospel as stern as was the daily life of his hearers; no other would have

fitted it. The farm, the common school, and the church, working together, laid the foundations, the ground tier of virtues absolutely essential in life—persistency, frugality, honesty, and last, but not least, the love of man, the fruit of love of God. In my judgment the brightest single flower in God's garden, in all the ages, was the American farm home during the two decades between 1820 and 1840, before the harnessing of steam, when children swarmed on every threshold, when house and field were alive with activity, when manual labor was respected, and when the higher education was for those capable of large things. The proof of this is the fact that when steam was harnessed and invention was stimulated by the prospect of great rewards, the training given by rural life sent the country ahead by leaps and bounds. It was at this period that men once more grasped the truth that the love of Christ was for diffusion, not for self-preservation, and through Boards without number they began to spread the story of Christ's love to men. It was then that Philanthropy awoke.

General Armstrong's parents belonged to this fine farmer folk, and opportunity was soon given them to attempt to transplant the spirit and practice of this simple life to Hawaii, where lived a pleasure-loving, indolent, but kindly people of untried capabilities. The labor of missionaries led them to formally accept Christianity, and such was their confidence in their new-found friends that they practically handed over to them the shaping of the political future of the Islands. Richard Armstrong, who, with his wife, had been in the Islands since 1831, was made Superintendent of Public Instruction, member of the Privy Council of the King and of the House of Nobles, and trustee of half a score of societies. He pushed with zeal elementary education and in a few years the younger generation could read as readily as though born in Ohio or New Hampshire. With the aid of generous gifts of money and labor the missionaries built huge churches and filled them with an eager people. The Hawaiian seemed to have what Henry Ward Beecher called "a genius for religion." But the missionaries were Protestants and could not, like the Jesuit fathers of Paraguay and California, gather their dusky children for morning and evening prayers, nor stimulate their imagination with processions and miracle plays. The bridge from Sunday to Sunday was a long one and swayed badly in the winds of temptation until, as General Armstrong sadly said, a Sandwich Island saint was about equal to a New England sinner. Work they would not, for the bright sunshine and fertile soil freed them from the necessity of regular toil, and the comfortable theory of natural inferiority had

to be invoked to explain the failure of this people to progress. Aliens stepped in and built up agriculture and business, and the natives, genial, affectionate, and hospitable, remain children, without a history and without hope of a future.

I have somewhat elaborated this attempt to civilize the Hawaiians, for in the providence of God it was the school which trained Samuel Chapman Armstrong for his life-work. He was his father's associate and helper during the years of his later boyhood, traversed the Islands with him and came to know thoroughly the grown-up children, whom he loved in his hearty, honest way, but whom at the time he hardly took seriously, for he was but a boy of twenty—a glorious, rollicking boy, a magnificent animal with the grace of a Mohawk Indian and the unconsciousness as well. His smile was winning, his intellect was keen, he had a fine contempt for the commonplace, and if he had the imperiousness of manner likely to come to those who have to do with inferiors in age or capacity, as to so many kindly Southern gentlemen, it, too, was all unconscious. He left the Islands with tender memories of family and friends, and carried a haunting memory which never left him of the blue encircling waters in which he had sported and over which he had sailed, of the noble mountains filled with angry demons, and of the kindly, simple folk whom he had been taught to protect.

Then came two years at Williams College, joyous, wholesome years, when he sat at the feet of that great, kindly, Christian philosopher, Mark Hopkins. Then the war, a captain at twenty-two, seizing a soldier's opportunity at Gettysburg to deal a telling blow on the flank of Pickett's heroes in their famous charge, then a major—but he was impatient. What to him was the constitutional question for which North and South were fighting? This was their quarrel, not his. He was a Sandwich Islander, a child of the world, if you please, as are most missionary children. He had entered the service largely through a spirit of adventure, drawn to it by the crowd of bright, earnest college graduates who in the year 1862 joined the Union army largely as officers. The North, desperate because of the wonderful fight put up by the South, in its need of men turned to the Negro race and in 1863 began to enlist black men, yesterday slaves. It was perilously near to inciting Negro insurrection; the South so looked upon the act and this explains the stern legislation at Richmond, which, however, was never enforced, for the Negro as a soldier was never an insurrectionist or a brigand. He fought in the open.

This was Major Armstrong's opportunity; he applied for colonelcy in a Negro regiment and was accepted. His life-work had begun.

The circle was complete from service in the Hawaiian Islands to service in America. "The call of the wild" was eagerly answered and the professional soldier became the Christian knight, eager to hit hard the institution which robbed man of his manhood in America, as his missionary parents had hit hard the indolence, loose living, and superstition which sapped the manhood of the Hawaiians. He drilled his men to a finish and thirsted for an opportunity to show the stuff that they were made of. The opportunity came, and black men proved that while they could live patient slaves—biding God's time—they could die like heroes when the clock struck the hour. The war suddenly ended with the exhaustion of the South, and General Armstrong discovered that he had become an American citizen by the operation of a Federal statute giving citizenship to a foreigner serving in the army for three years.

The war was over and throughout the South there was industrial chaos. Slavery had prevented the working of God's great law, the law of progress, and it fell. Sometimes we wonder how slavery in America, had it escaped the war, would have met the mighty progressive forces of the last fifty years,—the universal application of machinery, specialization in industry, the dynamo, and above all the fierce democracy that is sweeping the world. Perhaps those conservative men of South and North who were derided by fire-eater and abolitionist felt the breath of these onrushing forces when they prayed for patience.

If the white was stunned, the Negro was bewildered. He had never bought for himself food or clothing, hardly a jackknife. He was practically without knowledge of values. He was cursed with the improvidence which results from ignorance, as well as with absolute poverty. It is doubtful if the possessions of the Negroes of the South in April 1865 would have averaged, in cash value, five dollars to the family, and they did not own the equivalent of a township of land six miles square. You can search history in vain for such poverty and yet it was borne with hardly a murmur by ex-slave and former master, who was stripped of everything save the bare land.

The keen-witted young Brigadier had been studying the Negro during the year and a half that he had commanded a black regiment and later a black brigade, and while he was moving about as an officer of the Freedmen's Bureau amid the wreckage in Eastern Virginia. He studied the Negro and his needs directly and then by comparison with the undeveloped people whom he knew—the Sandwich Islanders—and what did he find? First, that the Negro had but little directive energy. Slavery wanted machines, not men, and must stifle any attempt to develop real leadership. The result was

pitiful at emancipation. The ex-slaves were without natural leaders and, when black men of superior force of character did assert themselves, they were looked upon with suspicion. Slavery did what the unscrupulous press and demagogues are doing today in this country; it destroyed confidence of man in man and, unless I have been a dull observer, this same lack of confidence still retards the progress of the Negro. There can be no advancement until there is hearty acceptance of leaders and faith in them. Slavery made men suspicious one of another, broke down faith of man in man, and prevented the true organization of society. Had there been a few thousand men among the Negroes at the close of the war recognized as leaders, the race would have advanced by leaps and bounds, for never has a people shown such eagerness for the best for their children or been willing to make such sacrifices for them. The lack of directive energy in the Negro was in my judgment the fruit of slavery, *not* a racial weakness.

Added to this was contempt for manual labor. This was perfectly natural by the simple law of association. The manual laborer of the South had been a slave. The two terms were interconvertible: laborer—slave, slave—laborer. Get away from manual labor if you would emerge from slavery. But poverty, grim poverty, compelled the Negro to toil with his hands. Then let him do the least possible and seek employment the farthest removed from its grime. The logic is weak, the result was pitiable, but it was all perfectly natural. Pride in the work that is at hand, even if it is humble, marks the summit, not the low level of civilization.

Worse than the lack of directive energy and his contempt for manual labor was the low standard of honor and morality in the colored man. The atmosphere of fear into which he was born created the one, and slavery, with its denial of family rights, was responsible for the other.

No one saw this gloomy picture more clearly than General Armstrong, but this was not all. He saw that the ex-slave was more unmoral than immoral and that he had grasped, through the teaching of noble Southern masters and mistresses, the rudiments of Christianity. If his theology was sounder than his life, there were many Uncle Toms who had seen the vision, who had learned that man's dominion ended with the body, that the soul is God's. I know that our cynical American humor makes light of the Negro preacher and his tumultuous audience, but thoughtful Southern men did not when fifty years ago they left wife and children to the care of their black bondsmen and went forth to win constitutional privileges for themselves and, shall I say it, perpetual servitude for their servants.

They relied upon a patience born of Christian faith and their trust was justified. The Negroes believed in the personality of God, in his love as shown by a living, dying Saviour, his hatred of sin and love of the sinner, and the crown of righteousness that awaited the faithful; and if their morals sadly lacked consistency, if they unduly emphasized the pitying love of God, sympathetic friends like General Armstrong knew that when their faith came to be as intelligent as it was unquestioned, it would inevitably straighten out their lives. I should as soon think of smiling at the pothooks of an earnest child struggling with the alphabet as at the blind, stumbling search for God of the African slave. In my youth I made half an apology for slavery to the veteran Dr. Lindley, by birth a Southern man and a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for twenty years pastor of a great church in North Carolina (whose membership was part slave), and for many years a missionary in South Africa. I can see his kindly, searching look as he said, "When I contrast the degradation of the African in his kraal with the condition of the American slave in his cabin, I feel that were I that slave I should want a thousand years of eternity in which to praise God that I was born an American slave, but if I were his master I should want ten thousand years to plead with God for pardon that I ever held him a slave."

The men who were true to mistress and children during the war waged to perpetuate their condition, who, as Union soldiers, never maltreated a prisoner nor attempted to arouse an insurrection on slave soil, although in fighting strength about 200,000 men, and who never betrayed a Union soldier groping northward from a Confederate prison, a hunted fugitive, had certainly learned the elementary lessons of Christianity.

The remarkable adaptability of the Negro did not escape General Armstrong. As he put it, "The Negro in a tight place is a genius." His unfailing good nature, his desire of appreciation, his good fellowship, were all to be counted on in his struggle upward. Moreover he saw great apparent earnestness to gain knowledge and if much of this was uncouncious imitation and the motive eagerness to get away from physical drudgery, he saw promise in it.

But the Negro had made great strides in the forming of industrial habits, thanks to the iron regime of the plantation. Civilization rests upon the willingness of man to work from sun to sun, not one year but for a lifetime if necessary. There can be no national achievement, no public virtue without it. The Negro was not a willing worker for obvious reasons, but he worked; he had the habit of work and this was a tremendous asset. What he needed was a new

spirit; not merely the recognition of the necessity for work but of the *privilege* of work, a point which most labor unions sadly miss. This habit of unremitting industry formed in slavery saved the Negro at his great crisis in 1865. The Indian missed it when he first attempted to follow in the white man's way and he still staggers for the lack of its steadying power, but he is adjusting himself remarkably to his new condition.

The splendid physical vigor of the Negro, too, attracted the admiration of the youthful General. The out-door life, the steady work, the plain but wholesome diet of the plantation, had built up a people of fine physique. There were no weakening taints in their blood. With this rare vigor went the habit of obedience, and if this at times was servile in its manifestations, the essential was there—respect for authority. The Negro must needs accept white leaders until he could develop his own. Besides, he was an American. Not a tradition of Africa lingered except possibly among the few Negroes whom Northern greed had smuggled into the coast plantations. The ignorant Negro spoke the English language better than a Yorkshire laborer spoke it one hundred years ago. He loved his neighborhood because he knew and loved its local traditions. “Born and bred here, bound to die here,” is a Negro saying often heard and always to be honored. The town Negro, with his larger outlook, had a state pride that would shame some of us. Moreover, they were overwhelmingly Protestant in religion, as were the white people of the South, and there was no possibility of controversy in matters spiritual.

All these thoughts and many more passed in review through the active brain of the young Brigadier during the cruel years which followed emancipation, when he was in the service of the Freedmen's Bureau, bringing order out of chaos in this beautiful peninsula to which the Negroes had flocked by thousands during the war. A little school founded upon this spot was just starting. The Freedmen's Bureau was closing its work and what more natural than that this school should drop into the hands of General Armstrong forty-five years ago. He had a clean slate upon which to write his plan and he wrote it. *The genius of the man is shown in this—that he never had occasion to erase a word.* It was epoch-making in that it showed the proper method of educating a backward people and has powerfully influenced the education of the most favored. He turned back to his experiences in the Hawaiian Islands for light as well as inspiration; he prayed for the consecrated spirit of his father and mother and for wisdom to avoid the mistake of confusing religious enthusiasm and education with character. As he wisely put it, “In spite of possible material and intellectual advancement, absence

of character will be worse for the Negro and the world than mere ignorance." In his report to his trustees in 1870 he says, "The object of this school is (1) to make men and women, not profound scholars; (2) to dignify labor;"—simple as the Apostles' Creed and as comprehensive.

To this end he believed in co-education, and twenty years later said, "The Negro girl, both in school and as a worker for her people has been the surprise of our experience." He dismissed at once the teaching of Latin and Greek, saying that Northern schools are everywhere open to Negroes of superior scholarship. He limited the curriculum to the common English branches and behind it all, and *for all*, daily manual toil, not merely to earn support, but as a means of grace and hope of glory.

He saw that the South was still a rural people and likely to remain such for another century. With the vision of a statesman he said, "Here on the land lies the future of the Negro." Not like the Northern cry of "Back to the soil" was his slogan, but "Stick to the soil; sacrifice everything but honor and life, but get land." His was not a vision of villages of black peons in gangs grimly doing daily tasks at the command of some great landowner. It was rather the dream of his parents who had sought but in vain to establish the rural life of New England of the thirties and forties among the ease-loving Sandwich Islanders. He saw thrifty Negro farmers living in decent houses surrounded by land sufficient to support their families, where might be developed the homely virtues of industry, order, thrift, self-control, and that mighty power which we call initiative, that guiding instinct which, as General Armstrong so tellingly put it, more than the capacity to learn from books, is the special advantage of our more favored race. On these farms could be earned money to support good schools and helpful churches, with something for God's poor at home and abroad; where neighborly sympathy should take the place of suspicion, and mutual helpfulness of jealousies and quarreling. Out of such homes would pass a small but constant stream of earnest boys and girls to trades, the more competent to become foremen, then masters, and so employers of labor, while the scholarly would find their way to high school and college. Those who had worked their way legitimately to the front, been naturally developed from the ranks of earnest toilers, would be sane and safe leaders. He expected that the majority would stick to the farms.

To build the Negro into a self-respecting citizen from the ground up required more than classroom instruction even by such a devoted and capable body as the Hampton teachers, more than the object les-

son presented by its excellent model farm and the daily, intelligent, willing labor of the pupils. It meant the implanting of a new purpose which would carry the wholesome Sabbath atmosphere of this profoundly religious school into the rough week-day work of the world. Negro and Indian boys and girls, as they have caught here this spirit, have answered the prayer of General Armstrong, and become industrious, orderly, modest, thoughtful of others, and eager for service, and quietly into farmhouses, hamlets, and towns have carried the new life. Cabins have become houses, then homes, order has taken the place of confusion, thrift has banished improvidence, and quiet self-respect has driven out noisy assumption.

I have purposely dwelt upon the main object of the educational work of Hampton—the development of respect for labor, agricultural labor primarily, for it underlay and still underlies all real advancement of the Negro in the South. But an integral part of this is the work of the common school, and in the preparation of men and women, especially women, to teach, this school has done noble service. Its pupils have received a training equaled in but few normal schools of the land. Sharing the homely life of the people, using any rude shelter for a schoolhouse, always believing that a teacher is greater than his tools, Bible readers on the Sabbath, nurses to the sick, these noble men and women have carried sweetness and light wherever they have gone. What wonder that superintendents have publicly honored this school which has developed such modest, efficient teachers.

General Armstrong's vision of a great army of land-loving, land-holding Negro and Indian farmers is realized, just as the great North is once more awakening to respect for and interest in agriculture. Already the Negro, mainly in the South, holds in fee simple, 20,000,000 acres of land—the area of New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut—and rents 20,000,000 more. A decade hence he may have doubled his holdings. But Hampton stands for intensive farming, for Danish farming. Try to measure the output of these farms then, the backing that they can give to church and school, manufacturing and business, and to intellectual and social advancement. In his prosperity the Negro has not forgotten the church, and into its buildings he has put more than \$50,000,000, eight per cent of his hard-won savings. He gives yearly \$150,000 to carry the gospel to those less fortunate than himself. He has not lost his early enthusiasm for education; 1,700,000 children crowd the Negro schools of these United States and 70 per cent of the Negroes know something of books.

I have attempted to put in historic setting the story of General Armstrong's life; it would be incomplete if I failed to emphasize his

faith in you. In the years of his fierce activity his face was always to the front but when the hand of God enforced quiet he reviewed the past. It was then, in speaking of the Negro, that he uttered those memorable words, well-weighed and decisive: "There was then" — at the end of the war—"and has been since more in him than we expected to find and more than his old master dreamed of." It is all that an honest white man can say, it is all that a candid Negro can ask, and it is enough, for it is full of hope. To that love of fair dealing, that spirit of fair play which has always in the long run characterized the Anglo-Saxon, I leave the Indian and the Negro, with absolute faith in the future of both.



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